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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 003456

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PL](#)

SUBJECT: LIKELY COALITION PARTNERS NECK-AND-NECK ON EVE OF POLISH ELECTIONS

REF: WARSAW 3427 AND PREVIOUS

1. (SBU) Summary: National opinion surveys on the last day of the Polish parliamentary election campaign show the centrist Civic Platform (PO) and center-right Law and Justice (PiS) running roughly even (albeit with a slight edge to PO), highlighting the fierce contest for first place between the two parties that will almost certainly form the next government. The final week of the campaign has been marked by heated exchanges and recriminations among PO and PiS leaders, with PiS accusing PO of radical economic liberalism and PO branding PiS as socialistic and pandering to the extreme right. Following each such exchange, however, both sides have circled back to reaffirm their commitment to serve together in a coalition government. PO presidential candidate Donald Tusk's support remains just short of the fifty-percent threshold he needs to cross to secure a first-round victory October 8. He and PiS rival Lech Kaczynski's televised debate was postponed until September 26, owing to other parties' challenges and State Electoral Commission concerns. End summary.

2. (U) Opinion surveys published on the last day of the campaign were uniform in ranking PO and PiS nearly evenly matched, with a small margin for PO in every poll but one (which showed the two parties tied). These polls indicated that PO had the support of between 29 and 34 percent, and PiS a few points below PO's level. The populist Self-Defense came in third at between 10 and 12 percent, while figures for the remaining parties varied among the polls: the right-wing LPR had between 5 and 11 percent, the governing SLD between 4 (below the threshold for parliamentary representation) and 8 percent, and the Peasants' Party (PSL) between 4 and 7 percent. Meanwhile, PO presidential candidate Tusk's numbers remain in the mid-to-high 40 percent range, with Lech Kaczynski stalled at around 30 percent. Tusk has also maintained a decisive, 60-40 lead over Kaczynski in a hypothetical head-to-head, second-round matchup with his PiS rival.

3. (SBU) As anticipated, the campaign rhetoric has sharpened in the final week of the campaign. PiS candidates continue to attack their PO rivals for liberal, "experimental" policies (recalling the deeply unpopular shock therapy of the early 1990's) that will favor the wealthiest citizens; PO's flat tax proposals are a favorite target. Alternatively, PiS accuses PO of not having any program at all. PO has responded with equal furor, labeling the PiS program as socialist (PO leader and PM candidate Jan Rokita declared that PiS stands for "law and socialism," rather than "law and justice") and complaining about PiS's open courtship of the extreme right-wing Catholic vote. A senior PiS campaign official appeared this week on the Catholic television channel "Trwam" (an affiliate of the infamous "Radio Maryja," whose director recently vowed to "sink" PO); afterwards, Tusk warned against such a "dangerous political strategy" and both he and Rokita called into question whether PiS really wants a coalition with PO.

4. (SBU) After such exchanges, however, leaders of both PO and PiS continue to reaffirm the compelling logic of their likely coalition. PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski insisted that he is "100 percent sure" that his party will enter into coalition with PO, even as he continued to highlight fundamental differences between the two parties. PiS is not out to "sink" PO, he declared, seeking to distance his party (somewhat) from "Radio Maryja" (N.B., if PiS does manage a stronger-than-expected showing this weekend, the support of the ultra-conservative Catholic organization could well be a significant factor). Tusk publicly lamented the PiS attacks, but assured that it is "impossible" to think that PO and PiS will not form a coalition.

5. (SBU) Emboff visits to Poznan, Olsztyn, Augustow and Bialystok this week reinforced the message that we have heard elsewhere throughout Poland, that PO and PiS are expected to finish first and second in nearly every region. In Poznan, a business center in one of Poland's wealthiest regions, PO is expected to win half of the seats for the Sejm, with PiS coming in a close second. PiS Sejm deputy Aleksander Szczyglo, who represents the poorest region in Poland, in northeastern Mazuria, hoped for PiS to edge out PO as the top-vote getter, a real switch for an area that traditionally

supported the Polish Peasants Party and SLD.

16. (SBU) Comment: With a tightening race for first place, an upsurge in partisan attacks between PO and PiS was to be expected. It is encouraging, moreover, that neither side has allowed the fighting to get out of hand; both PO and PiS appear -- for now, at least -- focused on the need to work together after the elections. Already speculation here has begun to shift to the relationships within a PO-PiS coalition (determined in large part, of course, by the results of Sunday's vote). Divisions between the party leaders are often as much personal as they are policy-based; Rokita in particular is viewed as a difficult partner for PiS (one interlocutor remarked that Rokita is so sure of himself that "he'd tell the British queen which hat to wear to Ascot") and the Kaczynski twins are notoriously insular (a view shared by many PiS "insiders" as well). Most here expect life within the coalition to be rough.
Ashe